

BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE REGIONAL SERVICES CENTER

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Kenneth B. J. Hartman
Director

October 28, 2010

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett,

Thank you for your continuing leadership on pedestrian safety in Montgomery County. We appreciate your focus on this important priority, especially in light of the continuing economic downturn and limited resources.

At our October 18, 2010 meeting, the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board (WMCCAB) had the opportunity to hear from community organizations about their experiences in identifying pedestrian and traffic safety concerns and working with public officials on solutions to address them.

Several common themes were apparent in the input the WMCCAB received:

1. The metrics used to evaluate problem pedestrian safety areas may not reflect the reality of risks. While we applaud the County's attempt to target scarce County resources on areas with high numbers of pedestrian incidents, this approach can short-change communities without the most basic pedestrian amenities. Some roads, such as Tuckerman Lane, may not be high incidence areas because there are no sidewalks and residents are fearful of walking or crossing.
2. Better coordination is needed between the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, the State Highway Administration, and the Maryland National Park and Planning Commission, as well as other agencies in responding to pedestrian safety concerns. Our discussions with communities around the issue of pedestrian safety reveal that local neighborhood groups are struggling and frustrated with the process and increasingly confused about which agency or entity is responsible. There has to be a better way for the myriad of professionals involved to work with local communities.
3. A significant disconnect exists between recent pedestrian-friendly sector plans and adjacent residential communities. The White Flint Sector Plan was recently approved with a strong emphasis on improving pedestrian connectivity within the Sector Plan area; however intersections and roads connecting neighborhoods to this area are not pedestrian-friendly. Because of their proximity to schools and Metro, these residents want to embrace bike-to-work and other green initiatives but are unable to do so.

5. Communities are concerned about the appearance of bias towards creating vehicular efficiencies without parallel concern for pedestrian efficiencies. The variety of neighborhoods and their connectivity to walkable and bike-able urban centers is counter to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Efforts need to be made by the State and County to move vehicular traffic, but also to provide for better movement of bicycles and pedestrians, which may ultimately have the effect of taking vehicular trips off the road, reducing congestion in turn.
6. The processes for resolving pedestrian safety issues should be goal-oriented and not focused entirely on narrowly prescribed professional guidelines. Staff should be encouraged to be champions of low-cost, innovative solutions. Communities have shared with the CAB examples where they suggested low-cost, easy to implement solutions that were dismissed as not meeting the County or State's "engineering" standards. Perhaps these standards should be re-visited as there may be effective solutions outside of these guidelines that would increase safety for pedestrians, bikers or drivers. Further, easy to solve problems with broad consensus solutions should be able to be "fast-tracked." Additionally, staff should be measured on their effectiveness in meeting these goals.
7. A case-manager process for addressing and tracking community association requests should be employed. Communities often require assistance in articulating their concerns, evaluating alternative approaches and tracking solutions. Some community associations have engaged third-party traffic engineering firms to buttress their concerns. There are many associations across the County that cannot afford to do so but presumably have similar situations. This approach would improve customer service and help advance the resolution of community concerns that span the jurisdiction of multiple agencies.

The substantial common threads among the presentations and comments from others compelled the WMCCAB to summarize their experiences and present them to you. We would like to begin a dialogue with County Staff and the Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee on how best to meet the issues raised by the local community. To that end, we will seek to schedule a workshop on pedestrian safety in November where we can begin to work on these issues.

Thank you again for your leadership on behalf of Montgomery County. We look forward to continuing the dialogue with your staff on this important community matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sue Knapp", written in a cursive style.

Sue Knapp, Chair